

'TIL DEATH DO US

Four years ago, we lost **BIG PUN**, a legendary lyricist who changed the game with his furious flow. In tribute, we examine his jump-off—*Capital Punishment*, the classic LP that proved Latin MCs could rhyme and go platinum.





COMPILED BY Jon Caramanica, Saplosa Foster, Toshitaka Kondo, Adam Matthews, Keith Murphy, Leah Rose and Vanessa Satten
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The first Latin rapper to baffle your skull came and went quickly in rap. His impact, though, has far exceeded his time in the game. When it seemed like Latin Americans had been permanently excised from the rap world, Christopher "Big Punisher" Rios arrived with a lightning-quick liquid flow, a waistline worthy of two linebackers and a sense of humor to match—instantly making him one of hip-hop's most charismatic figures.

The recording of his debut, *Capital Punishment*, was a model of efficiency. Laid down mostly at Mystic Recording Studios in Staten Island in late 1997 and early 1998, it is a famously coherent album. "I think there were only two or three extra songs," recalls Pun's mentor Fat Joe. "Every joint he was making was better than everything that was out, so how could we take it off the album?"

Released on April 28, 1998, *Capital Punishment* went platinum in under three months on the strength of "Still Not A Player," the thug-soul remix (featuring R&B singer Joe) of the album cut "I'm Not A Player." Ironically, the song is an anomaly on *Capital Punishment*, four minutes of round-the-way seduction trapped in the middle of a fusillade of battle-ready rhymes. Still, it worked. Coming from Pun, the drippy, romantic come-ons were wild and hilarious.

In addition to appearances by Fat Joe and the Terror Squad, the album also featured guest shots from the likes of Wyclef Jean, Noreaga, Busta Rhymes, Wu-Tang Clan's Inspectah Deck, Mobb Deep's Prodigy and Black Thought of The Roots. Sure, it's a Latin rap classic—it was the first album by a Latin rapper to go platinum—a Bronx classic, a New York classic. But mostly, *Capital Punishment* is a hip-hop classic, an example of how a talent for twisting words can elevate even the most unlikely person to legendary status.

On February 7, 2000—less than two years after the album hit stores—the 28-year-old Big Pun died of a heart attack, a result of the weight-related problems he'd suffered throughout his 20s. *Capital Punishment*, though, remains an indelible document of a life cut short. On the occasion of the fourth anniversary of Pun's passing, *XXL* spoke with the people responsible for making the album as vital as it was, and still is.—JON CARAMANICA

SPEAKERS: Fat Joe Rapper, executive producer of *Capital Punishment* ♦ John "Armageddon" Eddy Rapper, member of Fat Joe's crew, Terror Squad ♦ Macho Pun's road manager ♦ Felix "Flex" Cabrera Pun's manager ♦ Sean Cane Loud Records A&R ♦ Matteo "Matty C." Capoluongo Loud A&R ♦ Christian "Soundboy" Delatour Engineer ♦ Damon "Nomad" Patterson Producer ♦ Domingo Padilla Producer ♦ Mark "Minnesota" Richardson Producer ♦ Rockwilder Producer ♦ Richard "Young Lord" Frierson Producer ♦ Mike "Trauma" Dewar One-half of the production team The Arkatechz ♦ Collin "Jugernaut" Dewar The other half of The Arkatechz ♦ JuJu Producer, one-half of rap duo The Beatnuts ♦ Vic "V.I.C." Padilla Producer, Beatnuts affiliate ♦ Miss Jones Singer, radio personality ♦ Joe Singer ♦ stic.man producer, one-half of the rap duo dead prez ♦ M-1 The other half of dead prez ♦ Prodigy One-half of the rap duo Mobb Deep ♦ Inspectah Deck One-ninth of the rap group Wu-Tang Clan ♦ Noreaga One-half of the rap duo C-N-N

Beware

Produced by JuJu of The Beatnuts

JuJu: Pun gave me an idea. He told me, "I need that dirty, grimy shit. You gotta give me a track that's gonna let niggas know how I'm coming." And I was like, "That's what I'm good at. Some niggas do dance records. I do the grimy, dirty shirt." So I went into the lab, did a couple of beats. I came back, let him hear some stuff and he was like, "This is it, man." [It had a Mobb Deep sample in the beginning] "I gave you fair warning: Beware."

Fat Joe: This is one of my favorite tracks ever by Pun, a greater introduction couldn't be done. So I got on the back of it and started talking shit, basically trying to tell niggas I'm not alone no more. I found a partner who sees my same point of view, and he's *nasty*. Deal with that. Y'all got a problem, let me know. Muthafuckas was like, "Not only do we gotta deal with Fat Joe, now we gotta deal with the nicest nigga in the universe."

Super Lyrical

Produced by Rockwilder

Featuring Black Thought

Sean Cane: Pun wanted to use Black Thought on there because everybody else was sleeping on him. He was like, "Yo, Black Thought is mad lyrical. Y'all don't realize that. Everybody's sleeping on him. Watch, I'ma put him on here so niggas see how lyrical he is."

Fat Joe: Pun was like, "Yo, I wanna fuck with him." And at first, I thought Black Thought kinda got in his ass. But Pun'll set a nigga up—let you rhyme equal to him, then come out here and fuck you up.

Rockwilder: When we did "Super Lyrical," Pun came up in the studio with Cuban Link. Pun ran through his lyrics, and the way he ran through it, he would say one whole long line like as long as his breath could hold it. And then he would open another track and continue where he left off on that track and double it up and then carry it to the next track. It was just ill to see somebody do that.

Still Not A Player

Produced by Knobody

Coproduced by Dahoud and Nomad

Featuring Joe

Nomad: Knobody let me hear the beat and he's like, "I'm putting these shits in it." He's like, "I've got some new shit that ain't nobody do yet. Watch everybody going to start biting." So when he put the little clickers in that shit, nobody had really did that. And he used that as a hi-hat.

I went to everybody. I went to Roc-A-Fella, Jay was like, "That beat's aight." I went back there after the shit dropped and he was like, "Yo, why you ain't give me that beat?" Everybody and their mother, I went and seen them with that beat.

But Pun was like, "Yo, that's hot, run with that." He knew. He was just like, "Oh, shit. I'ma

talk about girls, this and that." He was like, "I'm going to make this the flyest pimp Puerto Rican song." I was just like, Okay, whatever man, do your thing. He was just ill, man. To see him rhyme, like double-time. I mean that's the first Spanish cat I've ever seen kill it like that. "Da Da Da Da Da Da, Da Da Da Da Da Da Da, Da Da Da Da Da Da Da." He wouldn't take no breaths, just keep spitting, spitting, spitting, spitting.

Soundboy: As an instrumental, I knew, Wow, we got a grand slam here. Before any lyrics or any choruses were done, I think me and Pun knew we had something special. It wasn't your typical boom-boom-bap beat. It wasn't your typical hardcore, gloomy dark beat. It was kind of a happy, lighthearted beat, and I was very anxious to see what Pun would do to it. Pun was very versatile. He could do a song like "Super Lyrical," which is basically about lyrics, and he could do a song like "Deep Cover," which is a hardcore thugged-out joint. And then he could do a song like "Still Not A Player," which is kind of a comical song—but still keep it within the boundaries of hip-hop, still keeping within the boundaries of thugness, I guess, if you want to call it that. It's not like he came off weak or soft. Even though the beat might have dictated that, he still did his thing on it.

I've got to admit, I was somewhat apprehensive when Joe the singer came down. 'Cause I was like, "Joe and Pun? *Damn*." It's like Black and White. Extremes. Hardcore MC teamed up with, how can I say, a ladies' man type of guy—smooth, silky finesse dude. At first I was like, "I don't know if



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JuJu and V.I.C.

SOUNDBOY:

"He was good at coming up with ideas, seeing the big picture way before anybody else could. Amazing. Everybody could have doubted him and said, 'Nah, you couldn't do that.' But boy, he would prove you wrong."



Rockwilder and Soundboy

this is going to work. This is like, too extreme." This is way before the J. Los and the Ja Rules and what have you. I didn't know if it was going to work.

On the "Boricua/Morena" part, Joe, an Afro-American, was having problems saying the word "Boricua." [Joe was like] "Borick-qua... Bor-qua... Borequay..." I remember Pun was basically telling Joe to say it the right way: "No, Bo-ree-qua." So when he finally got it, we was like, "Okay, it's a wrap." And we just knew we had a monster on our hands.

Joe: Pun came to me with the idea to merge the two songs together—my original song, "Don't Wanna Be A Player," and his "Still Not A Player." We was just merging the two records together.

He was there when I did my part. Pun was cool. Just real relaxed, very focused, a very focused person. He knew exactly what he wanted. He knew automatically that the song was gonna be a smash. He felt it from the door, when he brought me into it. *Let's make this magic happen.* It was fun—a lot of fun. We kind of made history together. The record just continued to be a big record everywhere it went.

Flex: Pun really changed the whole perspective for Hispanics with that song. It took us around the world. It changed our whole lives. That was the most influential thing in our lives.

Pun loved to show the similarities between the races. He was a genius. Pun changed the way we thought about ourselves. He brought greatness out of all of us. He made us chase our dreams. Pun opened our eyes to a lot of great things. Pun is a Moses to me. All that negativity and that disbelief, he parted it, just knocked it

out. We were doing everything we could just to stay in the market. Before Jennifer, Ricky Martin or anybody, Pun did it for Latinos. And they used him to touch the urban market. This song means Pun flying first class, slumped out all over the person next to him.

The Dream Shatterer

Produced by Domingo

Domingo: When I was in the middle of doing [Fat Joe's] *Jealous One's Envy* album [in 1995], Pun was always coming to the studio. Pun asked me for a beat tape, because CDs were not even in style yet. The beat for "Dream Shatterer" was on that tape, and Big Pun always told me, "Yo, when I get a deal, it's on." He told me not to sell the beat. A couple of years went down the line. Pun called me one night when he was working on *Capital Punishment*. He was like, "What's up with that beat that I told you to save?" I was like, "Yeah, I still got it." So I went up to the studio, Axis Studios on 54th Street [in Manhattan]. Pun came in the room and played me the original "Dream Shatterer," which was with the Barry White sample. He told me that he couldn't clear the sample because at that time Puffy had the record out with Black Rob with the same sample. So Pun said, "Take the a capella of 'Dream Shatterer' and let me know if the beat matches it." And to be honest with you, when I went home and threw the beat on and put the vocals to it, it sounded like Pun actually rhymed to the track.

When I first stepped in the studio with him to do "Dream Shatterer," I'd seen him rhyme before—but when he was doing his album, I saw a totally different Pun. I saw the hungry Pun. Just watching him rhyme and seeing the size he was, I used to bug out how he could spit so many words and not even lose his breath.

His work ethic was incredible. He was a prankster. He was ready to get down. If you were in the studio lounge room, he was joking around. But when he walked into the recording booth, he was all business.

Punish Me

Produced by Frank Nitty

Featuring Miss Jones

Miss Jones: It was a very warm session. I had been friends with Joey for years, since he was on Relativity Records and I was a receptionist there. I had fun. I stayed there pretty much all night. They let me fly and then they came in and tweaked just a little bit. But for the most part, they gave me my artistic freedom. A lot of sessions are very rigid and phony and artists come in late and you have to wait several hours and then they have to listen and approve your vocals. But Pun was there and he was very hands-on with all the production. They appreciated the value of a singer. They didn't just want me humming, sounding stupid and off-key. They appreciated it.

Fat Joe: I heard "Punish Me" as a freestyle. Pun had a lot of gems that he wasn't even aware of. When I heard that, I said, "You can rap about

the bitches." And he said, "Yeah, I can rap to the bitches." Then I said, "We need to make a song for the bitches, man." He didn't think to do that before. I told him, "Yo, we gotta take Biggie's place."

Pakinamac Pt. I—Skit

Trauma: That's the skit I did. It got me a lot of ass, I ain't going to front. That was a little moment. I remember I was in the booth and we were just recording this skit, "Pakinamacinthebackoftheac." I was like, "What the fuck is this skit? What the hell is this?" Pun said, "Just say whatever, just go with it." So I went along with it and it was hilarious, they loved it. But I was like, "Pun, take that shit off. That shit sounds wack. You got me sounding like a corn." He was like, "Nah, that shit is fresh right there." So they kept it on. And everybody was like, "Yo, that skit was off the hook! Was that you right there?" It was ill. I got my vocals on there real quick. Thanks, Pun.

You Ain't A Killer

Produced by Young Lord

Young Lord: It's interesting how that whole thing happened. Once I finished the beat—that was '96—I was doing a whole bunch of songs for The Lox, they was signed to Bad Boy but weren't out yet. So I was one of the people demoing songs on them. And Joe and them were in the studio and I hustled my way into getting a meeting with them. He was like, "Yeah, I'm working on this new artist." He brought Pun over to my house and they lis-

tened to maybe about 20 beats and that was the last beat I played. I didn't think they would like it, because it had the West Coast elements to it. It was some West Coast shit, a little wah-wah keyboard in there. He was like, "Yeah, that shit right there."

It was big. I was 18. I was still in high school when we recorded it. That was actually the first time I had done something outside of the whole Bad Boy camp. It was just me being in a factory at Bad Boy. I had been at Bad Boy for two years under Puffy's direction. Puffy was still training me, so he was hating on all my tracks. They just weren't acceptable to him, which was his prerogative. So this was a transition. It was a way to show that I'm making it happen.

When it came out I had just started college [at Seton Hall]. It was crazy to be in the dorm and people were playing my joint.

Pakinamac Pt. II—Skit

Sean Cane: He was a fucking hilarious dude, man. Doing that skit, that shit was mad fun. Like, Pun came up with the idea for the skit starting, and then the song coming on, "You Ain't A Killer," and then right after that song, we get killed. He's like, "You've got to do it like this. I get shot. Trauma gets shot. Free gets killed..." He had that whole thing mapped out in his head. He wasn't making nothing up as he went along. He was like, "We're going to start it like this, and then that is going to happen, and then this is going to happen." That was kind of ill to me, the way he had shit just planned out. And it was dope.

Caribbean Connection

Produced by Young Lord

Featuring Wyclef

Macho: Pun's work ethic was right. That's one thing—he didn't want to play when it came to his album. He was straight business. Give him the beat, he's writing immediately to it. He had his album mapped out already in his head. Joe would come by and he'd be like, "Yo Joe, I need Wyclef on my album." And Joe just made it happen. And Wyclef just came off The Fugees selling like 15 million albums. And Joe pulled it off. It's funny, 'cause no one knew Pun at the time. He wasn't an established artist, but Joe was. So Joe'd get the features for him, and once they heard Pun they was like, "Hell yeah, I'm doing this. This kid is nasty." A lot of times people are like, "I'ma do it for the check." Nah—whoever we picked for this album did it out of love and at a family rate.

Soundboy: I've never heard Wyclef come off hardcore the way he did on that track. You might want to say he's kind of like a folk singer. I've got to say I think it was Pun with the pitchfork on Wyclef's ass—like, "You see how I'm coming. I want to see how you going to come on this!"

Young Lord: Pun always liked that beat. But [at first] it just didn't work for Joe. It wasn't hot [to him] and Joe didn't like it. We kept it moving. I'd built a good relationship with Pun, he lived right around the way, so we used to hang out or whatever. He always loved that beat. Then his album was pretty much done, and he called me from LA and said, "My album is pretty much

Jugnaut and Trauma

TRAUMA:
"[Pakinamac Pt. I]
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done. Can I have that beat please? I need to have it, but Joe doesn't see it yet. Can we kind of do it without you being paid and all that stuff?" At that time, I believed in the brother. So we just kinda went ahead and did it.

I sampled a Jamaican record: Johnny Osbourne. What happened is, I didn't clear it. [Osbourne] did the Delfonics' "Ready Or Not" over—you know, [the song] The Fugees did. Two months after the album came out and hit, we got a call from niggas in Jamaica asking for some paper. But Jamaicans didn't write the song—they just owned the masters. So yeah, we cleared it. [We gave them] about 20 grand.

Glamour Life

**Produced by L.E.S. for TrackMasters
Featuring Fat Joe, Triple Seis, Armageddon and Cuban Link**

Armageddon: We was going to use a different beat, actually. The beat that he used with Wyclef on "Caribbean Connection." That was going to be the beat. "Glamour Life" was dope at the time. Now I look back like, That was wack. But at the time, "Glamour Life" was dope. We thought we was doing it. Pun has always been the nicest out of everybody. We was just following his lead for the time being.

Fat Joe: It was genius the way he kept flipping the chorus. Pun, not having a verse on there and just flipping the choruses, just steals the whole show.

Capital Punishment

**Produced by Trauma and Jugrnaut
of the Infinite Arkatechz
Featuring Prospect**

Trauma: Pun was a perfectionist. We'd be in the studio, listening to the track, and you'd think he was sleeping. The record played or whatever and then he'd be like, "Yo, it ain't thumping. The mids ain't thumping, this ain't happening, the bass ain't so and so." And you'd be like, "You heard all of that?"

"We got to go back, tweak it, tweak it, play it." He always did it over and made sure it was right. "I didn't like that. Did you like that?" He always asked for everybody's opinion. It was an experience working with him, man. It was a pleasure working with him.

When he heard the "Capital Punishment" beat, he was like, "That's it, right there." See, I'm thinking he's going to rhyme on some street shit, some shoot-'em-up or whatever. But he just came with some knowledge shit and I was just blown away.

I was like, How are you going to hit this? I'm thinking he was going to be on some—'cause the record was hard, it wasn't no dance shit—I thought this guy was going to come out blazing on some, "I'm going to kill this nigga..." And he said, "Nah, I got something in mind already for it—and I'm going to add Prospect onto it." So when he came he knew exactly what he was doing. He just did it one, two, three.

[The original track] had Laurence Fishburne

MACHO:
"Pun's work ethic was right. That's one thing—he didn't want to play when it came to his album. He was straight business. Give him the beat, he's writing immediately to it."



Macho

talking about real estate and property values and all of that stuff.

Jugrnaut: It had an excerpt from [John Singleton's] *Boyz N The Hood*.

Trauma: We set it up like the actual song was a mini-movie. It was like five minutes long! The beginning of the Laurence Fishburne was like a minute and change. We couldn't even use that for the album. Sample reasons, obviously. And lengthwise. It wouldn't have really been worth it. But, creative-wise, it was a killer with that part in it.

We was little amateurs at that time. I don't think I was even legal yet, to be honest with you. I'm producing records and I still can't get into a club to hear this shit. This was the first major record that we produced. I was on the train, after the album dropped, going to the office. I see this kid bopping his head hard! So I'm looking at kid, kid bopping away, and I didn't really pay him much mind. But then we was getting off at the same spot. So while we was getting off, I hear him saying the words to "Capital Punishment." He's shaking his head, got his nose up like he smelled something bad. Just *Arghh!* Killing him! I just shook my head like, "Wow, that kid is feeling that shit." That was an experience right there. That felt good. I went and called my partner, like, "There was this kid on the train..."

I'm Not A Player

Constructed by Minnesota

Minnesota: When I was younger, I used to go to the family parties in the projects on Webster [Avenue in the Bronx]. When I was a little kid they

always used to play the O'Jays record "Darlin' Darlin' Baby." I had found a jazz version of the record so I combined it with the original O'Jays joint. I actually had SWV in mind, to get the beat to them. But Big Pun heard it and he loved it.

It's so funny, because I had known Chris [Pun] from the streets. So he was like, "I'm rapping, I'm rapping." It was like, I knew him... He had gained weight—'cause he used to be skinny. Chris used to be real skinny. I had lost track of him after he moved out of Soundview. He had moved to 163rd and Southern Boulevard, where they have the [mural memorializing] him. He knew I was doing production, I bumped into him and that was the first time he told me he was rapping. I hadn't seen him in so long and he was big, like he had already gained that weight. I think he was working out and he had broke both of his legs. When he broke both of his legs, that's when he had gained all of that weight. He was like, "I'm Big Punisher, don't call me Chris."

The next thing I know he was inked up, and he was like, "Yo, I'm signed to Loud. I want some beats from you." When I heard him rap, I was a little shocked. Like, "Wow, he can actually rap." Knowing him from the street, I had kind of underestimated him until he opened his mouth.

'Cause he was always joking and stuff like that. He had never spit nothing for me until we actually went and did that record. So when he laid it down on that record, I was shocked.

I played the track for him and he had a vision for it. I didn't disagree with him; the only thing I had disagreed with him about is when we got to [the chorus of the radio version, where he said], "Crush

a lot." I was like, "Crush?" The original version was: "I'm not a player, I just fuck a lot." I was like, "Crush a lot? Find another word." He was like, "There's no other word, watch." He was like, "Mark, you doubting me? You doubting me, Mark?" He was like, "Watch. Watch. Look. Watch. Aight."

Fat Joe: I argued with Pun to the day that he died that I gave him that line: "I'm not a player, I just fuck a lot." We was watching the videos in the house, they had the shiny suits and was flashing the watches and all that. I was like, "We need to make a record like: 'I ain't a player, I just fuck a lot.'" He was like, "Word! That's hot!" Sat down right there and started writing it. Being that was his biggest record ever, he fought with me about it forever.

Twinz (Deep Cover 98)

Produced by Big Pun and Fat Joe
Featuring Fat Joe

Fat Joe: Me and Pun obviously had to do a song together. Being that the album was so East Coast, I told him we had to do something for the West Coast. We didn't want to rhyme on the West Coast tracks from the time, so I said let's do "Deep Cover" over, which was the most East Coast-sounding track to do. At the time, I really thought I was getting over on Pun. When we was writing, I thought I had him. I was coming with: "Creep with me, as I cruise in my Beemer..." I thought I was freaking it! But that was not the case. I still don't know what his shit means. I can still hear Pun saying, "You're limited, Joe."

Pun would always say, "Dead in the middle

of Little Italy, little did we know that we riddled two middlemen who didn't do diddy." Like that line was a joke, like "pakinamacintheback-oftheac." I'm pretty sure I told Pun he needed to put that in the record. He was like, "Nah, that's wack." I told him, "No, put it on." That was the most legendary rhyme he was ever known for. He thought it was just a joke.

The Rain & The Sun (Interlude)

Produced by dead prez
Featuring dead prez and Prospect

M-1: We were sitting in this one room [at Loud Records' offices] that's like an artist's room, where you would sit back and play music and just smoke out, and just listen and vibe to new shit. Just wind it out. We were in there and then Pun came through with Terror Squad and new members, people from the Bronx. We sat down. We were all in one room and he would play something that he just mixed last night. And we'd play something we just mixed last night.

stic.man: We played "The Rain & The Sun," the real rough version, and Pun was like, "I want that. Gimme that for my album." And we was like, "Word?" And then he was like, "Yeah, I want that shit." He was real open.

The thing was, we was brand new. We wasn't never thinking we was gonna sell shit being new. And it was like singing shit, so it was just some shit from the heart. And then Pun was just like, "Yo, I be feeling like that."

Boomerang

Produced by V.I.C. from The Beatnuts

V.I.C.: That beat's weird 'cause it turns every six bars, it's not like your four or your eight, so it's kinda strange if you really listen to the record. The reason I'm doing it every six is because it felt like it waited too long if it was on the eighth bar. It just felt better coming around on the sixth bar. [The sample is from the soundtrack to *La Planète Sauvage*.] That was a popular movie out in France, but it was from the '70s. It's a real rare record, I got it out in Boston from a record collector there, Bob Gibson. He was selling the record for \$200 and I just traded him. Actually, from what I heard, based on the popularity of Pun's record, they put out the movie again in France. And it's funny, because we never cleared the sample.

But it was a weird type of beat. After a while, I thought, Damn, this is maybe a little too complex for your average listener. I thought maybe nobody can rhyme over this. When Pun did it, to me it was amazing.

Armageddon did the hook. Being that it's on six, if you listen to it you know the hook falls in right with the flute part. It comes in and it ends right. On the second chorus, it doesn't come in on the same spot, if you listen to the record closely. I don't know if Pun or Armageddon took that into consideration. But as you hear the song go along, there was no format, like, "Okay, this flute part comes in on the beginning of the chorus and the end of the chorus." So the song structure was kind of crazy if you really listen to it, as far as music theory would be concerned.

Armageddon: I was the hookmaster out the crew. Everybody wanted hooks from me, that's when I did the hook for "Boomerang." I wrote it and said it. I wrote a lot of Joe's hooks. Even on my own songs, a lot of people would hear it and be like, "I need a hook from you."

The only thing I'm upset about is I didn't get no damn credit on the album. I don't know whose fault that is. I don't want to blame it on Pun, God rest his soul, but me and him had our own little animosity towards each other. He was like the new kid in the group and I'd been around for years and I was expecting to drop. And he came out of nowhere and took all the shine and took all the light. I understood, slightly. I understood it was just, I was the man for the minute and then he comes out of nowhere and he's the man. I had to suck it up. It was for the best for all of us. He was the golden goose. But I ain't really too pissed off about it. It just kind of bothered me.

You Came Up

Produced by Rockwilder
Featuring Noreaga

Noreaga: We were supposed to do a whole other song. It was supposed to be me and him, like, going back and forth talking about being muthafuckin' young Puerto Ricans trying to go platinum. I was running around so much that I never got the chance to do that. So one day he called me like, "Yo, I gotta close this album! You

L to R: Young Lord and Sean C.



YOUNG LORD:
"Two months after the album came out and hit, we got a call from niggas in Jamaica asking for some paper."



PRODIGY:
"He was like, 'Yo, I want you to be like this. This is the concept of it.' And he basically told me what to do. So I was like, 'Alright cool, I'll take it from there.'"

Prodigy

gotta come to the studio." So when I got to the studio, this is the first time I had ever said anything that I didn't completely write the whole thing. He had the whole hook already. So I said, "No problem, I'ma leave your format. But I gotta change it to my way." I remember Coors Light and Hennessey, that was the motive of the session. Going into the studio, you had to take a shot of Hennessey—which I was cool with—and drink some Coors Light, which at the moment I didn't really understand that the Coors Light was replacing the Pepsi. We sat down and ordered like 1,000 pizzas, and we just sat there and ate. We always had a ball. With Pun, it was never business. It was always fun and he was always a great person to be around. I'm really happy to have known him.

Fat Joe: That was a song I wasn't too crazy about, because of the horns. Bwaaa waa waa [*imitates drunken horn sounds*]. I thought it was too happy. I don't know how we made that the single, I don't know how I let them niggas convince me. We got Nore, who was family. But it was almost like a joke to me—it wasn't like a real song.

Rockwilder: Pun was cracking so many jokes. I would call him a big Twinkie and he would call me an oversized Redman doll. That shit was so funny, dude.

Soundboy: Pun was already thinking about the video on that one. I remember it was a room full of people—Joe was there, the squad was there, Nore was there. And he was like, "In the video, I'ma jump out of a window and then land on the floor like nothing. Then I'm going to dance, do *Starsky & Hutch* across the hood of a car." We're looking at him and we're like, "You're not going to be able to do that, bro. You're 400 pounds. There's no way." He's like, "Watch, you're going

to see. Watch." The world might have doubted him but you go back and you look at the video, he did everything he said. The jumping out the window, the sliding across the hood, the dancing. He was good at that. He was good at coming up with ideas, seeing the big picture way before anybody else could. Amazing. Everybody could have doubted him and said, "Nah, you couldn't do that." But boy, he would prove you wrong.

Tres Leches (Triboro Trilogy)

Produced by RZA
Featuring Prodigy and Inspectah Deck
Fat Joe: *Tres leches* is a Spanish dessert that me and Pun used to eat—a sweet piece of cake, three different milks. I remember we gave RZA cash for the beat. RZA was like, "Yo man, I'm saying, I need a paper bag with some money in it." I'm like, "Yo dog, you know we get paid by the check." He's like, "Yeah, the government, man, the government. I need that cash, man."
Inspectah Deck: Pun was in the studio, P was in there and they were working on it ahead of me. I came kinda late and just really got involved with what they was doing. I didn't really have an idea of where the song was headed. I was grateful for the opportunity. It's like, *Pun and P?! I ain't going to miss that.*

When I got in there, it was like a little pressure. I ain't going to front. You got Big Pun in there rhyming. He's a force. He was just becoming a force. And P had already had his name solidified in the game, as well as myself. But I still had a little bit to prove because I still hadn't

done the solo thing. Just being in that room, they brought the best out of me. You can't say anything wild on a track with Pun.

Prodigy: It was Pun's idea [for each of us to start our verses the same way]. He was like, "Yo, I want you to be like this. This is the concept of it." And he basically told me what to do. So I was like, "Alright cool, I'll take it from there." He was just like, "There's going to be a sample in there, Rakim. And then, 'Remember me?' The one you got your idea from." He was just like, "Take it from there. Build off of there."

Fast Money

Produced by Danny O & EQ
Fat Joe: I'm still looking for them dudes [the producers]. They were so talented, from the Bronx. To this day, I never see them no more. They used to harass and call me all the time, follow me to the barbershop and shit. I'm still looking for them dudes. I think I got work for them.

That was one of the greatest storytelling rhymes in hip-hop, ever. It's songs like this that make me think Pun don't get his props. This shit is ripped down to the point of a blind man sees this. So lyrical, to me one of the most lyrical storytelling rhymes ever.

Parental Discretion

Produced by Showbiz
Featuring Busta Rhymes
Fat Joe: A lot of the tracks are off of beat tapes, but Showbiz did this specifically for Pun. Called up Busta, came right to the studio. He never met Pun, but they hit it off. We played Busta Pun's verse. He was bugging, like, "Oh my God, this is crazy! I can't fucking believe this!" We didn't want Pun to be bottled up in any particular style. Even though he did "Still Not A Player," he still could rock this underground shit with Showbiz.

Matty C.: I signed Pun from what he did on Fat Joe and Raekwon's "Fire Water." It was how he spit on that track, which was a Showbiz-produced cut.

When I was watching Pun recording "Parental Discretion" I knew he was special. Just with how he commanded himself in the vocal booth. Not only was Pun running the show, but he was also cracking on the engineer during the whole session. This is Pun's first time in the studio making an album, and he's just running circles around the studio people with his knowledge. Not necessarily the technical aspects of the studio, but just understanding his voice and how he needs to sound. He did something completely unique with how he laid his vocals. He didn't do a vocal track and then an ad-lib track. He did two overlaying tracks where the first word would overlap with the last word of every phrase that he said. It was just ill. He was teaching the engineer.

I just felt like Pun had it. I knew, being a Latin rapper, that Pun's appeal was going to go even further than his skill because of the way society is. But at the same time, that's not how we marketed him or how he wanted to be marketed. Pun wanted to be marketed as a rapper. ♠

DAVID YELLEN